

"Go Ahead and Play Checkers — Just Don't Move This Checker"

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Imagine you were playing a game of checkers — playing to win.

Someone leans over your shoulder, puts a thumb on one checker and says, "Go ahead and play — just don't move this checker." Then someone else leans over your other shoulder and puts a thumb on another checker. Then a third person immobilizes still another checker, then another, then another ... Soon all thumbs; no moves.

Could you ever expect to win a game like that? Of course not!

Yet, most Americans expect their senators and congressmen in Washington to solve the monumental problems of recession, inflation, devastating unemployment, and a dangerous energy crisis while working under the same insurmountable conditions.

In the struggle to find solutions to these grave problems, the restricting thumbs are the high-pressure demands of special-interest groups — they do not really want to paralyze the nation's problem-solving efforts. Each just wants to immobilize one checker. Each is simply looking after its own special interest — making sure that their financial gains are not affected, insuring that certain tax advantages are not disturbed, guaranteeing that subsidies are maintained, etc. Collectively, they prevent any solution.

And in real life you can't see whose thumbs are coming down on the checkerboard. You don't know what forces are making the game impossible to win. That's why we the citizens must step in and say, "THUMBS OFF!"

And when I say "we," that is exactly what I mean. Alone there is precious little you can do to change things. But firmly united with nearly 300,000 other concerned Americans in Common Cause, you will be amazed just how much you can accomplish.

Common Cause is a hard-hitting, relentless and successful national citizens' lobby. It was born of the dire need to return to all citizens their constitutionally guaranteed right to have their voices heard in their own government. We know that our country will never find equitable and meaningful answers to today's crippling problems until secret — and all too often corrupt — pressures of special interests are exposed to public view. And to cast off these pressure "thumbs," we need support.

Since our inception in the fall of 1970, nearly 300,000 Americans have banded together in Common Cause. Our membership is made up of concerned citizens — independents, Democrats and Republicans —

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from all walks of life. We have been praised by both the press and the public as the best organized, most professional movement of its kind in history. In the few short years of our existence, we have scored major victories such as:

- Making it a lot harder for big-money operators to corner political influence and buy politicians. In 1971, we sued both major parties for violating campaign financing laws, and our suit prodded Congress to pass a better law. In 1972, we successfully sued the Committee to Re-elect the President to force disclosure of secret campaign contributions. And among the gifts we forced out into the open were secret funds that had financed some of the most scandalous Watergate episodes.
- Our activity laid the basis for Congress's enactment of campaign finance legislation in 1974. Our members made the issue so hot, Congress had to deal with it and not duck it.
- Opening up our government to let citizens know what their elected representatives are doing. For example, in 1973, we played a key role in persuading the committees of the House of Representatives to reverse their long-standing habit of secrecy and to open up most of their bill-drafting sessions.
- Sparking the greatest wave of state legislative reform in the nation's history. In the past 2 1/2 years, 46 out of 50 states have passed one or more of the "accountable government" reforms recommended by Common Cause.
- Reforming Congress. We, for example, helped end the outmoded and tyrannical seniority system. We helped break the autocratic power of the House Ways and Means Committee, the committee which deals with your taxes. When three formerly entrenched committee chairmen were deposed, it made headlines. One, Representative Hebert, openly blamed Common Cause for his ouster.

Yes, we've come a long way ... but we have an even longer way to go.

Political corruption, backroom fixes, secret deals — aside from their moral repulsiveness — create a government that just does not work. And

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accounts which distort the truth, claiming that no evidence of conspiracy was found when, in fact, no investigation was made in that direction.

Oswald's Involvement with Intelligence Agencies

Two specific flaws in the Schweiker-Hart report merit special criticism: (1) the omission of any consideration of Oswald's involvement with U.S. intelligence agencies — a matter directly within the purview of the committee's investigation; and (2) the assertion that Cuba was somehow involved in the assassination.

From 1956, when he entered the Marine Corps, until his death in 1963, Oswald had a record of encounters with the intelligence agencies that can scarcely escape the attention of a serious investigation. He enjoyed a high security clearance while stationed at an Air Force base in Atsugi, Japan. He accomplished his defection to Russia with funds in excess of his own limited savings. He returned to the U.S. two and a half years later on a loan from the U.S. State Department. Home in New Orleans, Oswald created a paper chapter of the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee, where his actions had all the earmarks of an agent provocateur. As the report notes, he moved in both pro- and anti-Castro circles. Because of the committee's failure to investigate Oswald's background, it misses the likely motives for the CIA and FBI cover-ups.

Connection with Cuba

The committee's speculations about the involvement of Castro's Cuba are downright irresponsible. Stories pointing to Castro's involvement, cited as unpursued leads, are mere innuendo and hearsay.

The committee's primary reason for citing unpursued leads that suggest possible Castro retaliation is found in the story of AM/LASH. AM/LASH (a code name used by the CIA) was Rolando Cubela, an official of the Cuban government. He had secretly plotted with the CIA against Castro as early as 1961. In mid-1963, the CIA renewed its contact with Cubela, and by September, his case officer had promised CIA support for Cubela's plan to stage a coup against Castro. The plan to assassinate Castro was not considered, if at all, until late fall. Such a plan could not have provided Castro with the time needed to plot Kennedy's death in November 1963. The report implies that Castro suspected Cubela, was having him watched, and learned of the plot against him. But the report states there is no direct evidence that Castro was aware of AM/LASH's 1963 dealings with the CIA. We believe that the AM/LASH story is a deliberate distraction.

Finally, the notion that Castro was contemplating retaliation in late 1963 is contradicted by Kennedy administration officials, such as William Atwood. He was a former UN envoy, and was directly involved in negotiations toward better relations with Cuba. Frank Mankiewicz, in an interview with Castro, reported that Castro was encouraged by Kennedy's friendly overtures in the fall of 1963. In any case, Cuba could never have expected better treatment from Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson.

One Step

A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step. The Schweiker-Hart report is just

that — a single step. Moreover, this single step could not have been made without thirteen years of determined agitation by assassination researchers and political researchers who have struggled against the orthodoxy of the Warren Report

Recommendation

The Church Committee has recommended that the new Senate Intelligence Oversight Committee pursue the new investigative leads. Senator Inouye, the head of that committee, has said that the Kennedy assassination has a low priority and will not be scrutinized for at least six months. Considering the turtle-like pace of these investigations, it would be folly for us to relax in our own research. We have little reason at present to be optimistic about the prospects for a full congressional inquiry.

* *The Investigation of the Assassination of President Kennedy: Performance of the Intelligence Agencies*, 106 pp., April 23, 1976, released June 23, 1976.

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The Center for Constitutional Rights won a historic landmark decision when the United States Supreme Court ruled 8-0 that warrantless electronic surveillance was illegal. This was just two days after Watergate. If we had not brought that case, the practices of Watergate might still be unknown to us — and, what's worse, they still might be occurring.

Each time the Center enters court, it faces an opponent of unlimited finances: the government. The Center, on the other hand, is supported only by contributions from friends like you who are concerned with the protection of our civil liberties.

We ask for help so that the Center can continue its vitally important task of protecting our constitutional rights. Please help us.

Injustice anywhere in this country is injustice to everyone. None of us can afford to let the courts be used as instruments depriving people of freedom rather than guaranteeing people their freedom.

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if we, as a nation, are to survive our current crises, we must have a government that does work, a government that is not paralyzed by surreptitious pressures and arrangements.

The problems we face would be terribly hard to solve in the best of circumstances. They become downright impossible to solve when underground pressures and deals paralyze the whole machinery. It is the "Thumbs on the Checkerboard" all over again. And because the citizens are the ones who ultimately foot the bill of all this graft and corruption, it must be the citizens who rise up and demand "THUMBS OFF!"

(Editorial note: For the rest of this article as originally written, please write to Common Cause.)

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6. The Invisible Government. Wise and Ross. Random House, 1964.
7. Six Crises. Richard M. Nixon.
8. The Invisible Government.
9. "400,000 Dollars Pour Abattre Kennedy a Paris." Camille Gilles. Juillard Press, Paris, 1973.